

POLICE DOG



THE MASTER CONSTABLE

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Chapter 4: The Master Constable

June 2, 1988

02:42 Hours

West Woodburn, Northumberland, North East England

I was thankful that the 'Special Examiner' Dogs had stayed long enough to clean away even the slightest stain of Zack's blood. I wasn't sure what I would have done if it had been left up to me... And, thinking about the blood, I needed to make my call for replacement medication.

The number wasn't written down anywhere, but committed to memory long ago. I could only hope it was still in service. I'd never once had the need to ring it.

The phone in my booth popped and clicked on the line as I spun the dial to make a connection. The number was unlike any I'd ever seen before; it most certainly was not a normal destination.

I could hear a line ringing on the other end, it continued unabated for almost a full minute. I was just about to give up and slam the phone down in desperation when I heard a click. The ringing stopped.

While I'd never called this number before, I had, however, been given exacting instructions on what to do.

I remained silent.

The line kept itself in kind. All that came back to me was my own breathing over the phone's feedback.

A few moments later I heard a long beep on the line, harsh and artificial, almost enough to make my ear hurt. Then there was nothing. A dozen heartbeats later two more quick beeps came in fast succession. That was when I spoke.

"Alpha-zero-zero-one. Requesting refill of package Janus. Location as publicly disclosed."

I hadn't the slightest what the first two parts meant, they were just what I had been trained to parrot, but the last part was my current position. They could find me in my official location, exactly where the police records had me. To be honest, I wasn't sure why I would ever be anywhere else.

I hung up the phone, setting it back on its hook with a soft click that echoed about the small space of my box.

Looking down at the desk in front of me, my eyes began to swim as I thought of all the

paperwork that I would have to do to account for Zack's death.

And, oh Lord, the murderer was still out there somewhere.

I reached forward, fingers grasping for the first paper as my mind raced. Should I be in here filling out the required forms or out there searching for the killer?

My fingers only made it far enough to just barely brush the edges of my folders before my head began to dip. Stars were misting forward in my vision.

No. I shouldn't need sleep. I'd just gotten a few hours. My body refused to listen as my head slowly, shudderingly, made its way down to rest on the small desk before me.

I rarely ever remembered my dreams, but tonight was an exception. My 'special therapies' were things I would not soon forget. They had always tied me down during them. And for that I was grateful.

The next morning began with a start that sent me tumbling from my chair, falling upon the floor to rip my already stained uniform. I'd barely enough time to register the morning light filtering through the narrow windows of my box, nor even to read the clock, before I scrambled for the phone. The harsh sound of its ring had been what so abruptly roused me.

"West Woodburn police box, Forty-Two speaking." I rattled off the line into the microphone, my mind still not having clicked into true awareness yet.

The voice that replied on the other end was as stiff and clipped as my own, another Police Dog. "Central London dispatch here, Ninety-Seven speaking."

"I read you, Ninety-Seven. What is your message?"

There was a pause and the soft shuffle of papers on the other end as the far Dog opened his missive envelope. It was procedure not to read the message until the receiving Dog had been contacted.

"Stand by, Forty-Two..." One final sound of ripping paper and he began to read, "This is to inform you that Master Constable Proust has been dispatched to your location." I felt the bottom drop out of my gut. "To perform your standard review and oversee the investigations of the two recent deaths in your territory."

I couldn't speak for a moment, my lungs seemed not to work. "I... I... Understood, Dispatch. Do we have an ETA?" My hands were shaking.

"Affirmative, Forty-Two. The Master Constable left early this morning with all haste. He should be arriving later today."

"Understood, Dispatch. Thank-you."

"Acknowledged. London out." The line went dead.

Master Constable Proust was coming here? Now? Oh God. Oh God, oh God.

I didn't even bother to concern myself with the stained and ripped uniform that covered me. I immediately began scrambling around my box, turning in ever quicker circles as I tried to stow everything away in its proper place, tried to ensure that everything was perfectly aligned, just as it should always be. The way a proper Police Dog would have it.

There wasn't much I could do in the cramped space. With so little room most things were already where they should be, but every time I turned around I knocked them aside with my tail.

Slamming open the door, I rushed out a step, letting in the fresh air and sunlight.

My ears fell.

I'd inherited the box from the former Police Dog that had been here. He had died of old age while at his post. The box had been dilapidated then, all but falling to the ground. It was better now, in almost all measures, but still not nearly up to proper standard.

Reaching back in, I snatched the miscellaneous money pouch from its nook and took the entire thing with me. I didn't even bother to lock the door to my box as I sprinted off towards the center of town and the few stores that clustered there.

From the corner of my eye I could just read the graffiti that still marred the wall of my home.

'Bad Dog. Very bad Dog.'

The General Store was next to the 'Crown. I'd been leaning up against its stone wall not eight hours ago. The sign that hung over its door read Shuster and Sons'. Although I knew for a fact that the owner, Wayne Shuster, had only a single daughter. And she was but three.

The bell tinkled above me as I pushed the door open and stepped into the cramped, homely store. It was at this point I realized what a sight I must look. Fur flayed out in all directions, teeth unwashed, uniform ripped and torn, covered with stains from last night's excursion. I was plastered from head to toe with everything from street grime to field dirt. The only thing that didn't mar me was the scent of blood.

I shivered. Thank the maker for small mercies.

Wayne was sitting comfortably on a stool not far from me, watching, as usual, a small black and white telly concealed under the lip of the counter. His head jerked up in surprise as I stepped closer. It wasn't that I was that unusual a sight here, this being the only General Store in town, but he was likely more set aback by my appearance.

"Looks like you had a rough night, Dog." He didn't smile as he spoke to me, but nor did he scowl.

"Yes, Sir." I nodded to him as I began walking up and down the short and crowded aisles, pulling off what seemed like every third item into my arms. "There was an unfortunate incident just outside your front entrance that resulted in the death of Mr. Zack Crow. As I'm sure you can understand, there is a pending investigation and I am able to discuss little."

"Yeah, sure. Coalburn told me all about it." He looked at me for a moment as I navigated the shelves, my arms filled to nearly overflowing with paint, tools, and parts. "Do you need a hand with that, Dog?"

I almost tripped over my own toes as I walked to the counter. Few in West Woodburn had ever offered me such a simple gesture of civility. It nearly rendered me speechless.

"Uh, no. But thank-you. This will be everything for today. However..." I paused for a moment, "I would appreciate a bag to carry it out with."

Wayne shrugged as he deftly rang the items up at his till, pulling a thick paper bag from behind

him with a practised motion. "Sure." He looked up at me again a few moments later. "This is a large run for you, everything okay?"

I cocked my head at him slightly when he asked. This was unexpected.

"Yes. Yes, fine. My superior is arriving today and I simply need to ensure everything is in proper order." I didn't know why I was telling him this, but even such a simple act of kindness seemed to be enough to push me flat over right now.

"Heh. Well, best of luck to you, Dog." He finished packing the last of my items in the bag. "That'll be seventy-five ten sterling."

I felt a whimper work its way softly up my throat. I had little over fifty pounds left after my purchase last night. I couldn't afford it.

"I'm sorry." Sighing, I reached into the bag, "I'm going to have to return some of these items to the shelves."

His hand came out to rest upon mine, I believe it was the first time we had ever come in direct contact. "Don't worry, Dog. We'll get it worked out. Haven't I ever written you up an account here?" He pulled a musty brown leather-bound book from under the desk, flipping it open. Within were the names off all the different townsfolk, various numbers tallied up beside them.

His pen hovered over the paper for a moment before he looked back up at me, "You know... I don't even know your name. I've just always called you 'Dog', like everyone else." He laughed.

The edges of my mouth pulled up into a tight, closed lipped smile. "Forty-Two. My name is Forty-Two."

He frowned at that. "No, not your number, your name."

I reached down to my badge where it sat still pinned to my chest, pulling it out so the tattered fabric of my uniform made a small tent. It read the same as it always did, 'K-9-78081842'.

"I'm a K-9 unit, born nineteen-seventy-eight, August 18'th, and my whelping number is Forty-Two. My name is Forty-Two, it's the only name I have."

He shook his head again and wrote down '42' in the ledger book. The column above me held the balance for Douglas Noel, one of the town's other residents. I didn't feel like correcting him on the proper written representation of my name.

He pushed the paper bag towards me.

"Wait, I can pay for some of it now..."

He pushed the bag again, forcing it into my waiting arms. "Don't bother. No interest. Just do me one thing," I raised an eye ridge as he spoke, "Catch the son of a bitch who killed Zack."

I nodded, a curt and abrupt motion. "That, Sir, I will most wholeheartedly attempt."

I left the store a moment later, running at the same clip I been when I entered. Out of the corner of my eye I could see a young child, no more than eight, watching me from down the road.

The first thing I did upon returning to my box was to pull my newly acquired brush and can of paint from the bag. The second was to roundly curse my incompetence for not remembering to pick up a paint can opener.

It took every erg of strength I had, and I more than likely blunted my claws in the effort, but I managed to get the top of the lid off with some grunting. It took only a single spatter of paint after that to convince me to remove my shirt. As stained as it was, I still didn't want to show it the indignity of being covered in drippings. I would have removed my trousers as well... but that wouldn't be a good idea. I hadn't any concerns about the paint falling across the fur of my chest, I could clean it up later or cut it out. It would grow back.

It took three coats of fast drying dark blue paint to cover up the graffiti, and another two over the rest of the box to make it look even halfway presentable. It almost looked like a proper police box by the time I was done.

The sun was high above me, almost noon, when I realized that I wasn't alone on the street. My nerves kicked in for a moment, what if it was the Master Constable? It would be unthinkable for me to receive him while out of uniform.

I jerked around, almost tripping over my own tail to see the small boy who sat on the cracked pavement not two strides away. He was watching me... just watching.

It wasn't with the wide eyed fascination that commonly captivated children his age, nor with the slit eyed calculation that was more often seen in adults. He was doing nothing but just... watching, without presumption or expectation.

It took me a few moments to be able to place him... He was Trevor, the son of Richard and Mary Hyatt, and the former brother of Jonathan, the child who had so recently met his end.

"Hello," I said to him, but he didn't shift his gaze, didn't even acknowledge that he was being addressed. He simply sat there, watching me as though I were a bug in a jar.

My fur began to itch under the hot sun.

Turning back to my box, away from him, I could still feel his small eyes studying my every move. I forced him from my mind and returned to slowly pulling my box into some vague state of repair.

There was much to do, but little of it I could accomplish without a full and proper workshop, and even less before the Master Constable arrived. The entire box sat at an angle, there was little I could do about that – I was stuck putting lipstick on the pig, and hoping it didn't oink while my master was watching.

A short time later I paused for a noon break. I really should be out doing my patrols of the town, and even more so tracking down the beast who had murdered Zack, but some things, such as being ready for the Master Constable's arrival, were simply more important.

Trevor still sat quietly on the ground next to me, exactly where I'd last seen him. The hot sun beating down hadn't deterred him in the least.

Finding a seat in the green weeds that surrounded my freshly re-blued box, I held a bowl of kibble in one hand and a mug of water in the other. The cup I'd originally been given for drinking was long shattered. I'd found this one, with only a small crack in its glasswork, in a dumpster behind the 'Crown last month.

It was just as I began popping chunks of kibble between my jaws that the child finally spoke.

"You walk like a man, you talk like a man, but you eat dog food. What are you?"

My lips pulled up into a tight smile as I was careful not to show my teeth. This was a question

that I had been trained for.

"I'm a Police Dog. I'm here to serve the community."

"So you're a dog?" He furrowed his brow and watched me, if anything, more intently.

"Yes, I'm a *Police Dog*." I tried to stress the words properly, hoping he'd repeat them as they should be. The difference between a 'Dog' and a 'dog' was as great as that between a human and a monkey. They may have both come from the same base, but it was that few percent divergence in their DNA that made all the difference in the world.

"I saw a dog once. It walked on four feet. You don't." His words were slow as he dredged up the memory.

Hmm. That was unexpected. All the clean up from the Goddard's animals had left the world with few true dogs remaining. They most certainly were not unheard of, but they weren't common either. I myself had never seen one up close.

"I'm not a dog like the one you saw. My parents', parents', parents' were once like that, long ago. I'm more than they were, I'm better." My whiskers twitched at the line. I didn't want to think about that too deeply. "Have they taught you about evolution in school? Genes?"

He nodded slightly, though obviously not understanding.

"The government took my parents', parents', parents', a long time ago, long before either you or I were born, and they decided to make them better."

"What's 'better'?"

"Whatever the government decides. They decided that they wanted us to be Police Dogs, so they took the best among us for the job and let them have children. Then they took the best among the new dogs and let them have children of their own. Eventually, with a little help from British science and ingenuity, they came up with me, a Dog. A Police Dog."

"What happened to all the other dogs, the ones they didn't like? Were they given good homes?"

I answered his question hurriedly, not wanting to try and explain the concept of 'disposal'. "They were taken care of, don't you worry. The government never loses track of us, they always know where we are."

"Did the government name you, or did your parents? Did they name you after a Prime Minister? Like Churchill?"

I shook my head as I crunched kibble between my teeth before speaking again. "No. I've never met my sire or dam. We don't have families like you do, we belong to the state... like an orphanage. I grew up with all my brothers and sisters in a big building called the Kennel. My name is Forty-Two, I was the forty second dog in my group."

"You've never met your parents?" His voice was weak and small. A shiver travelled up his body despite the warm day.

"Not once." I shook my head. I'd never really thought about it, I didn't even know their names – though doubtless it was on my paperwork that rested somewhere back in London.

"Forty-Two isn't a name, it's a number. Jack is a name, Dave is a name, Forty-Two is just a number. It's like calling you 'dog', it doesn't mean anything." He looked up at me, a pout on his face.

"It means something to me, Trevor." I took a moment to use his name. It was rare that I didn't call someone 'Sir' or 'Ma'am', but I felt it was appropriate at the moment. "Forty-Two is my name, it's the name they gave me, it's as good as anything else. It's like a name in a different language. Would you tell a French boy named Guy that his name isn't meaningful?"

Trevor shook his head. "I guess not... but you still need a better one." He paused for a moment, raising his eyes to the empty sky above us, then turning to the cemetery across the road where people were preparing for the funeral of his brother tomorrow.

"I've got it! Your name should be Jonathan." My back went stiff as he spoke. "It's a good name, and it's hardly been used." The child's grin widened, "And he would have liked that. He liked you. He used to tell me about you, about when he'd seen you here in town..." His voice trailed off for a moment, then he turned to dig a hand into one of the pockets of his bright red jumper.

A moment later he pulled out a stack of folded and crumpled Polaroid pictures. It was obvious the photographs had been taken by young, inexperienced hands. Their focus was off and the shots had been unsteady, but they were all unquestionably of me.

"Did your brother take these?" I looked up at him over the edges of the photographs that he held out to me.

Trevor nodded. "He really liked you, thought you were cool. He wanted to be a Police Dog when he grew up. But he was too shy to talk to you. He wanted you to have the photos someday."

I smiled at the line about 'growing up', but decided to keep my silence.

"Thank-you. These mean a lot to me, but I can't take his name. It wouldn't be proper."

"But it's a good name! It's hardly been used!" He began to pout, but then lightened up an instant later, "The name had meaning to *me*. Jonathan was my brother's name, and now it's yours. I'm going to call you Jonathan from now on." He was beaming now. Looking like the proverbial cat who had stolen the cream.

I decided at that point that I'd best conclude lunch and get back to work. Before the little one had any more bright ideas that were likely to get me lynched by the townsfolk.

Swigging down half my water in a single gulp, I tossed the rest of it into my face in an attempt to wet down my fur and keep cool. I had to fight back the deep urge to shake it off.

He sat there for the next two hours while I finished tidying up the inside of my box and changed into my only clean uniform. That last step was a bit of a challenge. This was my 'emergency' uniform, the one I only wore on laundry day as it was a size and a half too small. Even so much as getting into it was an ordeal. I tiptoed into my newly clean box, trying not to touch anything, then had to perform gyrations worthy of a world class gymnast at the Olympics to even get the darn things on.

The trousers were tight enough to make me wonder if the seams around my legs were going to pop every time I sat down, and the shirt showed off the muscles of my chest and arms a little too distinctly for comfort. My uniform was intended to make me look professional and efficient. Trustworthy. Not like a bodybuilder, and certainly not like a hairy stripper.

I snapped the door to my box back open after changing. It was a good feeling to have the door move as it should under by fingertips. The hinges had been squeaky and mushy since the day I'd first inherited them, now they were firm and crisp.

The sudden motion of the door was what surprised him.

It wasn't Trevor who pulled back, he simply sat there and watched me passively. It was his father, Richard who startled.

He looked up into my eyes, and, for an instant, I could see him panic at being suddenly so close to me, no more than a step away. Then, with an obvious effort, he pushed his fear down and nodded politely to me.

"Hello, Forty-Two." He worked a thin smile to his lips. "Watching over my son, were you?"

"Not quite, Sir. He was more of the one watching over me. He arrived a few hours ago and hasn't moved since then. I can assure you, he's been quite safe."

"I have no doubt of that. He'd been wanting to see you since his brother died."

"His name's not Forty-Two, Dad, it's Jonathan."

The man's face went pale as his son beamed and held onto his hand. I had to resist the urge to scuttle back into my box and close the door between us.

"Trevor, Jonathan was your brother. Don't you remember? Forty-Two is a Dog, not Jonathan." Richard spoke slowly, kneeling before his son.

The child looked up at him with a scowl, not seeming to enjoy being talked down to. "But he's gone now. He's not using the name anymore. I decided to give it to the Dog. That's what Jonathan would have wanted."

Richard was near motionless for a moment, only his eyes ticking back and forth between Trevor and I betraying life. None of us said a word. I kept my features carefully composed, not twitching a whisker. I couldn't, however, keep my ears from slowly falling to plaster against my skull.

"We'll talk about this later, Trevor. After the funeral tomorrow. Thank-you for looking after him, Forty-Two. I hope he wasn't a bother."

"Jonathan! His name is Jonathan now." The young child almost screamed it out in a voice so shrill as to leave my ears ringing.

Richards face was still for a moment before he let out a long held breath. "Thank-you, Jonathan. Thank-you for looking after my son." He never met my eyes while speaking.

The two of them left soon after, and I returned to something approximating my normal rounds. Not that anything about the last twenty four hours had been normal.

Sitting down in my box with the door left open to air it out, I began working through the forms for a murder. Some of them would be filled out at the morgue in Hexham, but that still left me with no less than fifty seven different pieces of paper that I was to complete before beginning my investigation proper. I couldn't even begin my hunt for the killer without spilling almost as much ink as he had blood.

At first I was looking over my shoulder to the road every few moments, waiting for the Master Constable's car to roll into town, but soon I immersed myself in the grisly task. Despite the unpleasant questions, and the memories they conjured up, I found the work calmed my heart.

The one thing that disturbed me, more even than Zack's death, was that I was left with no choice

but to falsify and misreport the statements to ensure there was no mention of my... incident. I was even forced to come up with a fanciful explanation of why I had snapped at the town mayor. Treading on a murder scene was reason enough for me to go so far as arresting him, but no Police Dog ever had ever an excuse for growling at a human. I could only hope that he had been too drunk that night to remember it.

I could only hope.

Falsifying police reports was a crime, and against everything I had been taught over the first four years of my life, but I had higher, overriding orders in play now. I rubbed my left bicep idly, feeling a dull memory of pain slowly spreading in a spiderweb like pattern from the much punctured veins.

It must have been forty-five minutes or so before I heard a vehicle pull up and park on the road beside me. I straightened, heart raising to a frantic beat. It had to be the Master Constable.

Turning, all I saw was the old red pickup truck belonging to the Hyatt family. The only person within was Richard.

I didn't stand up as he got out of the truck and walked towards me.

"What can I do for you, citizen?" My voice sounded dry and prerecorded, even to my own ears.

He stood at the cusp of my box, peering within. "I need to talk to you, Forty-Two," He grimaced at the last word. "Dog. We need to talk."

I nodded. "Understood. What can I do for you? However, I must remind you that nothing said to me can be guaranteed to remain in confidence."

I wasn't sure if he smiled or frowned at that. He did however close his eyes for a moment before looking at me again. "Not here, Dog. Get in the truck."

I cocked my head at that one. "I'm sorry, Sir, but I am waiting for my superior. He should be arriving shortly."

Richard turned from me, not bothering to look back as he walked towards the street. "Just get in the damn truck."

I shrugged. It was always possible that he had some information pertinent to one of my investigations. Clicking off the light above me, I snapped the box door shut and locked it tight.

Before stepping into his old, beat up ride I turned and stole a quick glance back at my home. I couldn't help but feel an ever so slight swell of pride. The box was hardly up to standard, but it was still the best that West Woodburn had likely ever seen.

Getting into the passenger's door of the truck was a bit of an adventure for me. I'd never actually been in a truck like this before. It may sound odd, but that's the way it was. I'd grown up in the Kennel, a single building, then walked out to West Woodburn after being given my commission. The closest I'd ever experienced to this was the cargo box like containers they had occasionally shipped us around in for off-site training.

Not that it was odd for Dogs to be in vehicles that is, the Special Examiners had driven their own van here. I'd just never had the opportunity, or need, for much of any locomotion other than my own paws on the ground.

I'd seen people get in and out of cars and trucks enough times that it was no problem at all to

ape them in the beginning. It became far trickier, however, the moment I tried to stuff myself in the cab. I had to nearly bend over double, so much larger I was than the average man, just to fit. My ears still pressed against the roof. And not to mention my tail that was kinked at a painful angle beneath me.

Reaching around with a grunt, I pulled forward the seat-belt a few inches before it caught and refused to come any further. Richard just sat in the driver's seat and watched as I struggled and fumbled with it, getting nowhere. The tight and constricting seams of my uniform didn't help much.

"Why don't you just leave it? We won't be going far," He suggested.

"I'm sorry, Sir, but that would be against the seat-belt law."

"I thought that only applied to humans. People drive livestock down the road all the time with them stuffed in trailers and truck beds. No one cares about that."

I paused for a moment before letting the argumentative belt slip from my fingers. "Point taken, Sir. Where are we going?"

He only shrugged, letting out a long breath. "Just around. Nowhere in particular. I just need to clear my mind while we talk. And you can stop calling me Sir." He had his eyes fixed firmly on the road now as he pulled away from the curb and my box, not even glancing over at me while he spoke. "If I'm going to have to get used to calling you Jonathan, then you're going to have to get used to calling me Richard in return." His lip twitched up for a moment, the glimmer of a gallows smile snaking through. "Just don't start calling me Dad. I don't think I could handle that."

I let my bulk relax back into the cloth upholstered seat as much as the space would allow. "Point taken... Richard. I can assume that you had a conversation with your son, then?"

His lip twitched up a hair further. "You could say that. Though it wasn't much of a conversation. He told me exactly what he was going to do, and didn't seem much interested in taking no for an answer. I just couldn't argue back. Jonathan, my son Jonathan, idolized you, I don't know why. He must have passed that fever on to Trevor."

"I suppose there are worse things to hold an interest in, but I'm sure he can do better." I fought to hold back a laugh. "Hasn't he any interest in comic books? Football? Surely there is something more worthwhile than I to hold his attention."

Richard chuckled, pulling the truck aside onto a gravel country road. To our left I could see a heard of sheep. I had to claw back an urge to bark at them. The instinct was quashed almost before it made it to my mind, but it shook me none the less.

"...so I'll be seeing you tomorrow then?" Richard's voice broke into my thoughts, pulling me away from the vague instincts of herding.

"Pardon?"

"The funeral tomorrow. You'll be there, won't you?"

I shifted slightly on my seat, suddenly uncomfortably aware of my tail pressed beneath me. "That would be highly unusual, Richard. I've never been invited to a funeral before. And, besides, Reverend Benson would be presiding..."

"Never you mind him. I was Jonathan's father, and I'm formally inviting you. Right now. He looked up to you, and, in any event... you were the one to find him, after all. It wouldn't be right for you not to be there."

"I can watch the proceedings, my box is right across the street. It really is no trouble."

"No." His voice was firm. "You will attend as a full guest. You were a part of his life, and a part of his death too." The truck was beginning to swerve back and forth now, weaving ever so slightly as he spoke. "Tell me you'll be there."

"I would be honoured." My voice was soft, "I will be there, I promise."

"Good." The truck straightened out now as he pulled an arm across his face and took a turn that swung us back towards town. "You don't know how much this means to my family."

I hesitated a moment before tentatively reaching out a hand to lay on his shoulder. "No, I don't think I do. I've never had a family like yours, I can hardly imagine what you must be going through."

He didn't smile anymore. His lips were a perfectly level line as he sped up, the countryside flying past us at an alarming rate. The gravel beneath us was starting to kick up, throwing me around the cabin.

"At least you're honest, Jonathan. That's more than I can say for most anyone else. Everyone else in this forsaken town pats me on the head and says 'There, there. I know what you're going through'. Even the ones who have never had children, who could never dream of the pain of losing a son. Why is it the only person in the whole town who speaks the truth is a Dog?"

"Perhaps it's just that, Sir. Because I'm not human." I winced after I spoke. I'd only then just realized that it likely wasn't a question that required an answer, and I'd once more fallen back to calling him Sir again. "I'm sorry, Richard. Perhaps I just have a different view of the world... being something that's not native to it."

"And we are, Jonathan?" His eyes never left the road. "How is it you believe that we have any more right to be here than you do?"

We pulled back up in front of my police box with the squeal of old brakes. I stepped out without another word.

Richard nodded to me as I closed the truck door with a solid thunk. He pulled away from the curb with the roar of an overtaxed engine, not seeming to care for the speed limit.

The Master Constable arrived two hours later.

There was little fanfare as his black, unmarked police sedan pulled up silently in front of my box. I couldn't see anything through the smoked windows, and I hadn't yet to smell him, but it could be no one else.

Three seconds later I was on the pavement beside the closed car door, standing at perfect attention. Or at least as close to attention as my overstretched uniform would allow.

Nothing moved. There were people up and down the street, but in my world nothing moved. I must have stood there for five minutes, hardly so much as breathing. I couldn't see him, but I could feel his eyes moving slowly up and down the whole of my body.

I could feel his disappointment.

The door clicked opened and his presence hit me like a punch to the gut. Stale cigarettes and the acid scent of his body. Master Constable Proust. His scent alone was nearly enough to send me crawling back to my box with my tail curled between my legs.

"Sir." I spoke without moving my eyes, never turning away from the middle distance in front of me. I heard the suspension of the vehicle creak as he stood up.

"Forty-Two." The disdain was clear in his voice. My name was a foul word to him.

A few seconds later I felt a cool glass cylinder press into my palm. A twin to the one I'd used last night. Hidden by my bulk, it would be invisible to anyone standing on the street. I flicked it up the sleeve of my uniform, out of sight in a single trained motion. It almost didn't fit.

"Direct me to your local inn. I will be taking a room. We will speak in the morning, after the funeral." His voice was less clipped and harsh than I remembered, more wary and beaten down.

I raised a hand to point towards the 'Crown. He walked off without so much as a grunt to dismiss me.

His black car, polished to a mirror shine, was left parked on the street. It sat between my box and the graveyard across the way. I couldn't even see the men preparing the grave now. Only my own reflection.

I returned to my box thereafter for a couple of hours sleep before beginning my night rounds.

I may have slept for the time, but I got little rest. Even the single whiff of Master Constable Proust's scent was enough to send me spiralling into nightmares that left me screaming and pleading for mercy.